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## Man of Deeds: Bishop Loras and the Upper Mississippi Valley Frontier

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## Book Reviews and Notices

*Man of Deeds: Bishop Loras and the Upper Mississippi Valley Frontier*, by Thomas E. Auge, edited by Amy Lorenz. Center for Dubuque History Occasional Publications No. 4. Dubuque: Loras College Press, 2008. xi, 262 pp. Notes. \$15.00 cloth.

Reviewer Timothy Walch is director emeritus of the Hoover Presidential Library and associate editor of the *U.S. Catholic Historian*, the journal of the U.S. Catholic Historical Society. His books include *Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present* (1996) and *Catholicism in America: A Social History* (1989).

Mathias Loras was, indeed, a man of deeds. Not much remembered by Iowans these days, Loras was the first Catholic bishop of Dubuque and the founder of a college in Dubuque that now bears his name. More to the point, when Loras first arrived in Iowa in 1839, he assumed responsibility for the evolution of the Roman Catholic church in a territory that is now the states of Iowa, Minnesota, and the two Dakotas. By the time of his death in 1858, he could contemplate a diocese that encompassed 50 churches, 47 missions, 37 priests, two orders of women religious, and a Trappist monastery.

This is not to say that Loras found it easy to build his diocese out of little more than hope. "God be praised," he wrote shortly after his arrival, "this diocese will be formed in the course of time. In the meantime, we are going to try not to die of hunger this winter" (89). Like many others who ventured west, life became a contest between long-term dreams and short-term needs.

Born in Lyon, France, in 1792, Loras was ordained a priest in 1815 and began his career as a seminary administrator. A conflict with his local superiors in 1829 and a timely invitation led Loras to emigrate to Mobile, Alabama, where he served as vicar general, college president, and parish pastor. In July 1837 Pope Gregory XVI selected Loras as the first bishop of Dubuque.

He devoted the next 20 years to that task and faced a wide variety of challenges. Foremost was the sheer poverty of his new diocese. He was fortunate, indeed, that the Society for the Propagation of the Faith was based in his native Lyon and was generous in its financial support. Loras also received support from the Leopoldine Foundation in Vienna. Such gifts allowed for modest growth.

Loras also faced a substantial challenge in finding enough priests to meet the needs of his sprawling diocese. His desperation would lead him to accept a number of troubled priests who were, at best, a mixed blessing. Not surprisingly, Loras devoted considerable energy to a "seminary on Mt. St. Bernard" that would later become the college that today bears his name.

The publication of *Man of Deeds* brings to completion the last scholarly work of Thomas E. Auge, a beloved professor of history at Loras College. Auge completed the manuscript in 1980 but never carried it forward to publication. The project was revived by Amy Lorenz after she discovered the manuscript in the collections of the Center for Dubuque History in 2006. "In working with Dr. Auge's manuscript," she writes in her introduction, "I have made every effort to maintain the integrity of his text, with minor corrections."

*Man of Deeds* is a useful study—the first scholarly biography of an important figure in Iowa history. It is thorough, balanced, and well written—based on Loras's letters and documentary legacy as well as the relevant primary and secondary sources available as of 1980. The only limitation to the study is that it focuses too closely on Loras himself and would have benefited from a broader look at the history of Catholicism in other midwestern dioceses at that time. *Man of Deeds* nonetheless merits inclusion on any reading list of books about the history of religion on the midwestern frontier.

*The Roots of Rough Justice: Origins of American Lynching*, by Michael J. Pfeifer. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011. 143 pp. Maps, appendixes, notes, index. \$40.00 cloth.

Reviewer Stacy Pratt McDermott is assistant director/associate editor of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois. She is the author of "'An Outrageous Proceeding': A Northern Lynching and the Enforcement of Anti-Lynching Legislation in Illinois, 1905–1910," in *The Journal of Negro History* (1999).

*The Roots of Rough Justice* is a tidy and provocative prequel to Michael Pfeifer's important comparative portrait of lynching in America, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874–1947* (2004). In this new book, Pfeifer examines the social and cultural antecedents of lynching to better understand the history of mob murder in America. Through an analysis of various American regions—particularly the cotton south, the emerging midwestern frontier in Iowa, and the desert southwest—Pfeifer argues that lynching was a white response to legal reforms that promised protections for non-white Americans. Historians of American lynching have primarily focused on the post-Reconstruction and